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C O N F I D E N T I A L KUWAIT 000516

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PGOV PREL PINR KU

SUBJECT: SHAYKH NASSER REAPPOINTED PM, DIFFICULT ROAD AHEAD

REF: A. KUWAIT 504

B. KUWAIT 214

Classified By: Political Counselor Pete O'Donohue for reasons 1.4 b and d

Shaykh Nasser To Form Sixth Government

¶1. (C) In a widely expected move, Kuwaiti Amir Shaykh Sabah al-Ahmad al-Jaber Al Sabah issued a May 20 decree reappointing his nephew, Shaykh Nasser al-Muhammed al-Ahmad Al Sabah, as PM and tasking him to form and introduce a new cabinet to the National Assembly when it convenes on May 31. The next cabinet will be the sixth government for Shaykh Nasser, who has faced a steady barrage of attacks from intractable MPs since he was appointed PM in February 2006. Earlier speculation that beleaguered Shaykh Nasser would be replaced by Minister of Defense Shaykh Jaber al-Mubarak al-Hamad Al Sabah was dispelled by the staged "hero's welcome" and celebration that accompanied Shaykh Nasser's return to Kuwait last week -- just in time for the elections -- following surgery in the U.S. (Ref A).

Comment: Shaykh Nasser Will Have His Hands Full...

¶2. (C) The historic victory of four women in the May 16 parliamentary elections (ref A) has injected an element of optimism not frequently heard in recent political discussions. The results were hailed by liberals and moderates as an indictment of Sunni Islamists, who -- in the view of progressives -- have stymied development in the country and turned Kuwaiti democracy into an object of regional derision. The results may also reflect the mobilization of those liberals who feared that another gridlocked parliament would lead to unconstitutional dissolution. The early outlook for this parliament is that a number of MPs support the reappointment of Shaykh Nasser and are eager to embark on building a cooperative relationship with the executive branch that will result in economic growth and badly needed infrastructure development.

...With Cornered Islamists.

¶3. (C) That said, many of Shaykh Nasser's main detractors also won their re-election bids, including Islamist agenda-driven MPs like Dr. Walid al-Tabtabaei and Dr. Dhaifullah Bu Ramiya and three MPs who filed the motions for grilling the PM that led to the March resignation of the cabinet: Faisal al-Mislim, Mohammed Hayef al-Mutairi, and Jam'an al Hirbish (ref B). These individuals will likely remain disruptive elements when the National Assembly reconvenes on May 31. Al-Mutairi announced earlier that he and his fellow Islamists may boycott the session due to the presence of two of the new female MPs, Drs. Aseel al-Awadhi and Rola Dashti, who refuse to wear the hijab. The PM, in

each of his failed governments, proved either unable or unwilling to lead his cabinet while fending off Islamist salvos. The new parliament, with its more moderate composition, might prove -- at least at the outset -- to be a group the PM can work with. The Kuwaitis certainly hope so. End comment.

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